DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 371 513 EC 303 100

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TITLE Involvement of Students with Disabilities in the New American Schools Development Corporation Projects. Project FORUM.
INSTITUTION National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Alexandria, VA.
SPONS AGENCY Special Education Programs (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 31 May 94
CONTRACT HS92015001
NOTE 35p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Demonstration Programs; *Disabilities; Educational Change; *Educational Innovation; Elementary Secondary Education; *Mainstreaming; Program Descriptions; *Program Development; Student Participation
IDENTIFIERS Inclusive Schools; *New American Schools Development Corporation

ABSTRACT

This study examined the involvement of students with disabilities in the New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC) projects. The report begins with a description of the competition to select demonstration projects that would create teams to design, implement, and disseminate "break-the-mold" schools to bring about educational reform. The winning designs are individually described, with particular attention to the ways that each professed its intention to meet the needs of students with disabilities in their implementation sites. The projects include: (1) Atlas communities; (2) Audrey Cohen College Design Team; (3) Bensenville Community Design; (4) Community Learning Centers of Minnesota; (5) The Co-NECT School; (6) Expeditionary Learning; (7) Los Angeles Learning Centers; (8) The Modern Red Schoolhouse; (9) The National Alliance for Restructuring Education; (10) The Odyssey Project; and (11) Roots and Wings. The study concludes that, as of the first part of 1993, little attention had been paid to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the NASDC project designs, and descriptions of some of the NASDC projects suggest that students with disabilities would require significant modifications for meaningful participation. Appendixes show the number of proposals received by NASDC from each state, list advisory panel members, and supply addresses of the selected projects. (Contains 30 references.) (Author/JDD)

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ED 371 513

INVOLVEMENT OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE NEW AMERICAN SCHOOLS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION PROJECTS

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Project FORUM

May, 1994

EC 303100

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This study was funded by the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education under Contract Number HS92015001. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education or the Office of Special Education Programs.

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Acknowledgements

The staff of Project FORUM would like to extend their sincere appreciation to the individuals whose efforts have served to enrich the quality and accuracy of this document especially the following members of the Quality Review Panel for this report:

John Corpolongo, Executive Director
State Department of Education Special Education Section
Oklahoma

John Herner, Director
Division of Special Education
Ohio

Kathryn A. Lund, Deputy Associate Superintendent
Special Education
Arizona

Martha J. Fields, Executive Director
National Association of State Directors of Special Education

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Abstract

Given the political pressure for educational change and the contributions that special education can make to enhance current educational restructuring efforts, it is important that everyone concerned with American public education, and most especially the education of students with disabilities, keep informed of the major efforts being implemented in the name of educational reform. This study was undertaken to examine the involvement of students with disabilities in one of the most visible of the reform projects - the New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC) projects.

This report on the NASDC projects begins with a description of the competition to select demonstration projects that would create teams to design, implement and disseminate "break-the-mold" schools to bring about educational reform throughout the country. The winning designs are individually described with particular attention to the ways that each professed its intention to meet the needs of students with disabilities in their implementation sites.

As required by the sponsor, each project pledged to include "all" children at their demonstration sites, and some recounted instructional approaches and techniques, such as individual learning plans and multiple year clustering for groups of students with the same teacher, that have strong potential for addressing the unique needs of children with learning problems. However, only one of the projects, Roots and Wings: Universal Excellence in Elementary Education submitted by a group headed by Robert Slavin of Johns Hopkins University, specifically planned for the participation of students with disabilities and demonstrated a clear understanding of the legislative and regulatory requirements that bear on their involvement. Proposals for some of the other projects suggest that students with disabilities would require significant modifications for meaningful participation.

The study concludes that, to date[1], little attention has been paid to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the NASDC project designs, and it remains to be seen what effect their pledge to address the needs of all children will have on the exceptional learning needs of students with disabilities as they are further refined and implemented.

[1]This report, although released in May, 1994, is based on information gathered during the first part of 1993.

INVOLVEMENT OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE NEW AMERICAN SCHOOLS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION PROJECTS

Introduction

Of all the educational reform activities taking place during the last few years, one that engendered intense interest and response on a national basis was the 1991 announcement of a competition for project grants by the New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC). This privately financed organization, established as a component of the Bush administration's educational reform effort known as America 2000, has as its major goal to support projects that will generate designs for "schools that achieve national education goals and meet world class standards for all students and help those students leave school prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning and productive employment" (Design, 1991, p. 13). It was the intent of NASDC to raise $200 million to support up to thirty five-year projects to design and implement "break-the-mold" schools. Changes in the federal administration, coupled with fundraising problems that continue to pose a serious stumbling block for the endeavor, have operated to scale down the scope of the original NASDC plan. However, projects have been funded and, with endorsement of the corporation's efforts by the new Clinton administration (Olson, 1993), the initiative is continuing.

One aspect of public education that has not been at the forefront in plans for school reforms is special education. Reformers often state that their changes will serve to meet the needs of most of the students who now are served in compensatory education programs such as special education. However, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and related State legislation involve requirements for specially designed instruction and many legal protections for students and parents. Adherence to the procedural safeguards and due process mandates of Federal and State laws is a well established responsibility of public school systems. Although there may be different ways to design and deliver classroom instruction for students with disabilities that might make them more successful in a reformed general education setting, schools will still need to have in place the necessary procedures to meet the mandates of special education law and regulations. The NASDC project is one of the few national-level efforts in the school reform movement, and it will be closely watched as an indicator of the potential for making public schools effective. Any evaluation or review of the funded projects would be incomplete without a consideration of their compliance with existing special education laws and regulations.

NASDC's Request for Proposals included a requirement that "designs must be for all students, not merely for those students most likely to succeed" (*Designs*, 1991, p. 21). Specifically, the explanation of this objective was stated as follows:

> NASDC's goals will not be met if the designs it helps to create produce high-performance learning environments only for the well motivated or children of middle class and the well-to-do. Perhaps as many as 40 percent of American youngsters under the age of 18 can be considered "at risk," including children from low-income or single-parent families, children with disabilities, and children with limited ability to speak and use the English language. Design teams must be explicit about the student populations they intend to serve and about how they propose to raise achievement levels of "at risk" students to world class standards.

Despite this statement, there was no specific condition in the RFP that the projects must provide special education or address the requirements of IDEA. At the bidders' conference NASDC held to interpret its requirements, questions were raised concerning the involvement of students with disabilities in funded projects. Replies included a reiteration of the RFP specifications and comments that, in evaluating proposals, NASDC will make sure that the design teams' work focuses on all student populations.

Given the general nature of the NASDC description of **all** students as their target population, this synthesis was undertaken to examine the attention paid to the special provisions required for students with disabilities in the proposals and the design phase (year 1) of the funded projects. This report includes information on the application process for those projects, a description of the funded teams, and a discussion of each team's response to inquiries about the involvement of students with disabilities in the planning and implementation of their design.

Study Approach

The recent and ongoing nature of the NASDC funded projects posed some complications in obtaining information about them. A number of articles have appeared in educational journals and newspapers and in the popular press commenting on individual teams or the enterprise as a whole. Those publications were reviewed and every effort was made to obtain all other relevant material. However, none of the published reviews or analyses addressed the participation of students with disabilities in the projects.

To obtain more pertinent details about this topic, phone contacts were made with NASDC, with each of the eleven projects funded during 1992-93, and with the RAND

Corporation, the designated external evaluator for the projects. Project personnel were asked to describe the way their project accommodates the needs of students with disabilities in their original design and their implementation plans. The information obtained from these conversations and from other materials such as proposals, newsletters, policy positions and other reports supplied by some of the projects constitute the primary basis for the findings presented in this report.

Background

NASDC Proposal Process

NASDC is a private, not-for-profit organization formed in July, 1991 by business executives who have pledged to raise funds to support the research, design, implementation and dissemination of what they are calling "break-the-mold" schools to bring about educational reform throughout the country (*Designs*, 1991, p. 21). The organization was formed as a component of President Bush's America 2000, a strategy for achieving the national goals that had been adopted by the governors in 1990. Just about every commentary on NASDC regardless of whether it is complimentary or not contains an observation about the political nature of the organization. Mecklenburger (1992) observes that "NASDC was a "political invention...designed as part of the self-proclaimed Education President's larger strategy" (p. 289).

NASDC had a fundraising goal of $200 million from private sources for the projects (Stout, 1992). The original plans of the corporation were to fund up to 30 proposals, each for as much as $3 million for the first year. A renewed application process would follow for years two and three for implementation of the models, and for years four and five to cover dissemination of the designs.

In August and September of 1991, NASDC held conferences in the Washington, DC and Los Angeles, CA areas and conducted a video conference on public television to obtain input on the draft of their Request for Proposals (RFP). The final RFP was issued in October, 1991 with a closing date for applications of February 14, 1992. The announcement called for "a new generation of schools--schools that set the pace for the nation and the world" and recommended that "the best proposals will start from scratch to respond to the following challenge: Assume that the schools we have inherited do not exist, and design an educational environment to bring every child in this community up to world class standards in English, mathematics, science, history, and geography, prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment. No question about schooling should be off-limits; no answer assumed" (*Designs*, 1991, p. 8-9).

Except for the statements that the designs must be for *all* students and a description of the "target population" in the Appendix to the RFP that essentially repeats the same content (*Designs*, 1991, p. 54-55), NASDC's guidelines for proposals contains no requirement that applicants address the special needs of any specific individual or group of students. Information provided at the bidders' conferences advised that the designers should expect to establish their own standards, or use national standards if and when they are adopted. Responses to questions raised by advocates for disability groups during the bidders' conference held in November, 1991 about provisions for the needs of students with disabilities essentially restated the RFP's guidelines. One question asked whether at-risk populations require different standards. The response was a definite "no" with the added statement that NASDC does intend for ALL students to reach world class standards (*NASDC Bidders' Conference*, 1991, p. 23). Again, reference was made to the specifics in the RFP where world class standards are discussed in general terms as skills and knowledge that students need "to function and compete effectively in a world that is becoming more complex and demanding" (*Designs*, p. 49). The RFP also noted that many efforts are now underway to develop national standards and that, although each project must set performance objectives, the teams are not required to provide an empirically based justification that they are "world class."

Response to the call for proposals was substantial, described by a reporter as "frenzied activity, interrupted by occasional public pronouncements and a fever pitch of excitement" (Olson, 1992, p. 1). Teams numbering as many as 50 or more partners were formed composed of individuals from universities, corporations, and community groups as well as schools, school systems, other educators, policymakers, foundations, and various types of consultants. According to by NASDC, a total of 686 proposals were received by the deadline. Teams represented a wide variety of combinations of participating individuals and organizations and came from 40 States, Canada and American Samoa. Appendix A contains a map showing the distribution by location.

The process of reviewing the submissions was also extensive: over 700 people were contacted in the process of selecting readers to serve on review panels for the proposals. Three review panels of approximately 60 people each were formed to carry out the first step in the proposal review process. The second level of review was performed by the Education Advisory Panel of NASDC and provided a further weeding of the proposals (see Appendix B for list of the members) RAND Corporation, the firm contracted by NASDC to provide research and analysis work and eventually to evaluate the funded projects, also participated at the second level. The final choice of projects for funding was made by the NASDC Board of Directors.

One of the participants in the review panels evaluated his experience and the process as a whole in an article in the *Kappan* (Sherry, 1992). He found the general quality of the proposals to be "disappointing" (p. 301) criticizing them for being too vague and for requiring a great "leap of faith" that the teams could accomplish what they were promising. Sherry concluded that, despite the problems he found with the process and his concerns with some aspects of the NASDC project, the selection process was a sincere effort by the panelists and a valuable experience. He described the competition as "a giant national think tank on the design of new schools" (p. 302) and he praised the collaborative approach as a lasting benefit for some of the unfunded design teams.

A more negative appraisal of the entire NASDC proposal approach was offered by another *Kappan* contributor (Whiting, 1993) who had been an unsuccessful applicant in the competition. That article criticized NASDC for limiting the membership of their Advisory Panel to educators, for failure to provide bidders with an indication of the deficiencies to be addressed by the projects, and for an unrealistic time limit in which to develop a truly innovative proposal. Whiting further commented that pressures from corporate funding sources and from political attachments acted to limit the selection to "safe, traditional proposals over truly 'break-the-mold alternatives" (p. 778).

NASDC Funded Projects

At the conclusion of the application process, the NASDC Board funded only eleven projects for the first year, not the planned thirty. (A list of those projects and the contact person for each one is contained in Appendix C.) The original framework for the projects involved funding about 30 projects for a first year design phase, selection of a smaller number to carry out a two-year implementation phase, and a final two-year dissemination phase in which the projects would assist in the replication of their design at other locations. In announcing its funding decision, NASDC also disclosed a change in plans by committing to funding all the teams from the first year for the full five years if they successfully completed the workscope for each portion of the components. Contracts were signed with each site although some of the negotiations were complicated especially in terms of the specific provisions for ownership of the design team's products.

A number of the funded teams represented already-initiated reform efforts and most teams were composed of very well known names in education. Criticisms of the final list included a repetition of the early charge of "elitism" by Mecklenburger (1992, p. 289) in an article in which he summarized the highlights of some of the losing proposals from the competition. Whiting (1993) commented that, despite well meant efforts, the result of the NASDC projects "will be to clarify the value of existing education alternatives, but not to break a mold that remains clearly outdated" (p. 779).

Evaluation of NASDC Projects

A complete evaluation of the NASDC efforts to create "new American schools" will be necessary not only to facilitate the ultimate goal of replication throughout the country, but also to assess the impact of the overall project on the public school system. Kirst ((1991) cites the absence of an adequate research program as the reason for the failure of educational reform of the 1970s (p. 38). He stresses the need for a carefully designed research plan to support the efficacy of the NASDC projects rather than positive statements of success by the project's promoters.

The RAND Corporation, involved with the NASDC project from the start in a consulting role, will do the formal evaluation of the funded projects for NASDC. According to Thomas Glennan of that organization, the evaluation plan involves a series of initial visits as the sites do curriculum development and staff training, and then full site visits to follow. The overall theme of the evaluation will be to see how the project plan evolves through the process of design and initial implementation. One of the evaluation goals to produce information that will eventually help schools that might want to adopt one of the models.

The evaluation design calls for the use of structured questionnaires to obtain input from everyone involved in the projects. Perceptions of parents, students, teachers and others will be compared with the vision of those who designed the models. This formative-type evaluation will send trained researchers to the sites to look for what distinguishes each project. The inquiry will be open-ended to uncover common and unique problems and strategies the projects used to activate their designs. The evaluation will not include any student performance measures since the models are not yet stable or fully implemented.

RAND advises that, since the designs were required to bring all students to high performance levels, the evaluation will examine what each site is doing about students with disabilities. They will be looking at whether the students are kept in the mainstream, referred out to special programs or excluded from project activities. Glennan noted that the NASDC projects are like "schools of choice" since no one parent or child is to be forced to participate, and it will be difficult to assess how this characteristic of the project influences student participation.

NASDC Projects and Students with Disabilities

The information that follows presents a brief description of each funded project and a discussion of the ways in which the design teams plan to conform to existing requirements to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the school sites where their designs will be implemented.

1) *Atlas Communities*:

This project is described in NASDC literature as "an effort presented by the 'giants' in education and educational reform" (NASDC facts, 1992, p.6). Team members include James Comer of Yale University, Howard Gardner of Harvard University, Theodore Sizer of Brown University, and Janet Whitla of Education Development Center, all of whom have well established reputations in the field. Additional participating organizations named in the proposal include Apple Computer, AT&T, IBM and the National Alliance of Business. The project will work with selected schools in Lancaster, PA, Norfolk, VA, Prince Georges County, MD, and the entire school system of Gorham, ME. Some features in the NASDC description of the Atlas Communities' proposal are: a focus on essential questions such as "Why does the world look and behave as it does?" to incite teachers' and students' imaginations; a planning management team composed of teachers, parents, students of high-school age and the school principal to prioritize, coordinate and monitor school activities; and, the use of authentic forms of assessment such as portfolios, performance examinations and exhibitions.

According to project personnel, focus groups composed of personnel from the four target sites have been convened to talk about all aspects of the operation. The intent of the Atlas Design is to create a unified vision using the strengths of the approaches that the participating organizations have already developed such as the support services teams from Comer's project and the curriculum and instructional approaches of EDC and Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools.

One of the "core beliefs" in Atlas communities is "All students will achieve at high levels." Project materials speak of a commitment to the education of all students without exception, applying an approach described as "personalization," a continuous process of thoughtful reflection and judgment to discover how each child learns and how the teacher can best promote the most powerful learning for that child.

Currently, project staff and consultants are developing policies that will include a statement about students with disabilities that has a strong inclusion emphasis conforming with a trend already established in the sites being used for the model's implementation. Project personnel intend to hold a meeting with the special education director in each site and, if necessary, with the State Director of Special Education to discuss implications for students with disabilities in the project design. With the delivery of instruction as one of their major issues, project personnel believe that special education personnel have much to contribute to general education as a result of the strong focus on individual planning for students that has characterized special education's approach.

The project is not considering waivers from any special education regulations for referral or evaluation at this time. However, among the concerns that will be addressed by the policy working group is potential fiscal audit implications of the co-teaching model where State regulations restrict special education teachers' providing services only to students identified as eligible for special education.

2) *Audrey Cohen College Design Team*

The designated contact person for this project refused to provide any information about the design or implementation plans, explaining only that the project is still in its formative stage and all documentation is considered "internal."

According to material furnished by NASDC, the project will serve "students from a range of communities, socio-economic groups and ethnic heritages" in from seven to 30 schools across the country who will study a major "Purpose" each semester such as "We work for good health." Students will go out into the community each day to take action and apply what they have learned in the classroom. This applied learning is described as "the cornerstone of the educational program." It can be assumed that the design this project will implement will be the "*Purpose-Centered System of Education®*" that Audrey Cohen has developed (Cohen, 1993, p. 792). There is no indication in either the *Kappan* article or the four-page summary about the project provided by NASDC that any consideration of the special needs of students with disabilities has been a part of the approach proposed by this design team.

3) *Bensenville Community Design*

The Bensenville project is unique among the set of NASDC proposals in that its design team was composed totally of individuals from all segments of a single, small community--Bensenville, IL, a village with a population of 17,000. The core of the model is a Lifelong Learning Center and strategies include reaching out to the entire community as a campus for learning activities. The project's plans call for a partnership with Illinois State University to participate in the redesign of teacher preparation programs, and the use of an Electronic Teaching Center through which each teacher would use a computer to monitor student work and carry out other requirements. There was very strong community support for the submission of the proposal which was written as a volunteer effort by everyone involved.

Project personnel boast of early successes such as a "parents as teachers" model implemented for the 0 to 3 age group, and their enthusiastic participation in information dissemination about their project throughout the State. The most intense part of the project

as it was proposed was the summer 1993 training for teachers and this component has been implemented.

Although the proposed activities are under way, the project was notified by NASDC in June, 1993 that it would not be funded for the next phase of its project. Project personnel were told during year one that there were some concerns with their timeline, but no specific reason was given for their elimination beyond the press release they received. No information could be obtained from NASDC about the cancellation of the project.

As with most of the other NASDC proposals, there was no specific reference to students with disabilities in the Bensenville plan, although plans for the intensive workshops with teachers this summer included a consideration of strategies to address student diversity.

4) *Community Learning Centers of Minnesota*

The leader of the Community Learning Centers (CLC) design team characterized their approach as "making an institutional bypass, not battling out change within a school" (Schroeder, 1992, p.1). The project will use the increasingly popular strategy known as "charter schools" as the means of realizing systemic change. The charter school concept, evolved from a model proposed by Ray Budde in 1974 (Lewis, 1993, p. 4), has been adopted by six States and is under consideration in four others (Diegenmueller, 1993. p.18). A group of teachers or teachers and parents obtain a charter from a local government to run a school with a considerable degree of autonomy. Minnesota was the first State to enact a law sanctioning charter schools. Such schools are free from many of the constraints imposed on regular public schools through State regulations and guidelines.

The CLC issued a two-phased call for proposals from schools that wanted to become sites for the project. According to project personnel, 82 applications were received from which five sites were chosen, less than the originally intended ten because of reduced NASDC funding. The "CLC Essentials" include, among other provisions, requirements that students and staff be involved by choice, not by assignment of the school district; that county social services be integrated into the CLC, co-located if possible; that CLCs develop their own staffing patterns and that they have the legally binding authority to hire, transfer, and compensate personnel according to policies developed at each site; that a personal learning plan be created with each learner and staff member; and, that parents and families be meaningfully involved in the student's learning activities.

The selected sites will implement the CLC design in the 1993-94 school year, and orientation and planning sessions will be held with teams from those sites during this summer. According to project personnel, the topic of students with disabilities is included in the agenda

of those training conferences. The staff considers their requirement that each child have an individual learning plan as a strategy that will guarantee that the special needs of students with disabilities in the project schools will be protected.

5)*The Co-NECT School*

This "Cooperative Networked Educational Community for Tomorrow" responded to the NASDC challenge to create break-the-mold schools from the premise that "it is not possible to change significantly what happens in schools unless you change significantly the nature of the human relationships that form the educational experience" (Olds and Pearlman, 1992, p. 297-98). Using that belief, the final design included, as two of the three key components, a self-managing cluster structure within the school sites, and a computer communications network that would connect school to home and to other local, national and global learning resources. The other key component is a project-based curriculum that includes in-depth seminars for subject areas and the development of critical work skills.

Materials provided by project personnel describe the cluster structure as consisting of half a dozen teachers and a hundred or more students with an age range of up to four years. The cluster's teacher team is to be a self-governing unit managing their own curriculum, budget, instructional organization and school calendar, and each teacher will act as special advisor for about twenty students for a period of several years. Clusters will be in competition for students with each other within the school to attract parents who will choose their preference for the cluster assignment for their children. Students will have their own computers with modems that they will carry back and forth between home and school. Each school's computers will be connected through a local area network, and families will be able to access the school network. The Co-NECT design also calls for summer camps for both teachers and students as a part of staff development.

The Co-NECT proposal makes no reference to the special needs of students with disabilities, although the identified target population is "K-12 inner city children, including a substantial number of children at-risk of failing to achieve" (NASDC Facts, p. 23).

6) *Expeditionary Learning*

This project is also using the charter school approach in at least one of its sites which will either start or restructure schools to accommodate "learning expeditions" as the basic instructional approach. The curriculum as originally proposed was based on the International Baccalaureate (IB), an advanced pre-university course of study followed in many countries and governed by an international examining board. According to project personnel, they

eliminated this component of their original design because it was not flexible enough to be incorporated with the other components of the project's design.

The key concept of this design is expeditionary learning, described as a fusing of the principles of Outward Bound with an inquiry approach using interdisciplinary methods. The fundamental unit is called an "expedition watch," a term borrowed from the nautical term for a group on duty. A watch is composed of eight to twelve students who form a work group for projects, and two to three watches will comprise a crew that will remain together with a teacher for at least three years. Sites for the project are Denver, Dubuque, New York City, Portland, (ME) and Boston.

This design team's proposal includes a section on "Special Populations" which states that the expeditionary learning approach "benefits any group of students, including special needs, remedial and bilingual students." The accommodations that might be made for a student with Down Syndrome are presented as an example, and the statement is made that the team will closely monitor the progress of special needs students.

Project personnel describe their approach as strongly inclusive. They characterize the success of Outward Bound in bringing diverse groups of people together to solve problems in a demanding but supportive environment as particularly pertinent to their inclusive philosophy.

7) *Los Angeles Learning Centers*

This project is a joint venture of the Los Angeles Educational Partnership, the Los Angeles Unified School District, and the United Teachers of Los Angeles. According to the original proposal, the basic concepts of the project include a major emphasis on the role of the teacher in bringing about change. Release time equivalent to one full day per week and other staff development opportunities are built into the schedule. The proposed management approach also contemplates a strong role for teachers along with parents, students and the principal on the councils that will govern each site.

Although the introduction to the proposal accentuates the diversity of the target student population in Los Angeles (LA) schools, this analysis does not mention students with disabilities. The size of the LA area with its complex urban problems, the large proportion of children of color, bilingual children and the socio-economic factors in students' lives are described as the context for the LA Learning Center. The support model proposed for these "high-risk" children is the "moving diamond," a representation of the project's plan to link each chid to a learning network. The child is at the base of the diamond, an older student is at the top point, the teacher is at the left and the parent/community is at the right. The

design proposes that each of the "diamond placeholders" will move with the student within the Learning Center's three clusters: beginning (pre-K to grade 4), intermediate (grades 5-8) and advanced (grades 9-12).

According to project personnel, special education is one of the areas they have not focused on as seriously as they would have liked by this time in their design process. There has been some turnover of personnel and a new director for the project was just appointed in June, 1993. It is the intention of the project planners to work on special education issues in the coming months.

8) *The Modern Red Schoolhouse*

The proposal submitted by the Hudson Institute team named its project after the idealized American educational icon of the little red schoolhouse, claiming that they have reinvented some of its key virtues in a modern context with a modern mission. The team is headed by former Secretary of Education William Bennett and includes Chester Finn, Denis Doyle, Pierre DuPont and the Superintendents of the eight participating school districts. Their proposal has been described as prescribing a classical education for all children.

The principal in the participating Hudson schools will assume the role of a CEO and each student will have an individual Education Contract that specifies outcomes. Parents will be told what preparation is necessary for their children to enter a Hudson School where students will be grouped in multi-age, multi-year classes with teacher/advisors. Grade structure is eliminated and students will attend the schools by choice, not by assignment. Students will be given as much time and instruction as necessary to complete each of the three divisions into which the schools will be organized. Traditional Carnegie units will be replaced by "Hudson Units" that will be outcomes measurements not linked to any fixed amount of time.

At least three times a year, students will be given "watershed assessments" in the core subjects to determine if they are ready to advance to the next division. AP tests will be the final "watershed" exam, and successful completion will be required to earn a high school diploma. The authors express their recognition that such high standards are commonly believed to apply only to gifted students but they have assumed that, with rare exceptions, all children can meet those goals if given the proper tools, expectations, time and encouragement. A provision is included in the original proposal for a waiver to this requirement in cases such as "students who have physical handicaps or learning disabilities...(who) will not be pigeonholed and exempted from rigorous instruction as too often occurs today, but will be taught in ways that challenge them to achieve high levels of knowledge and skills."

The designers expect that they will require some changes in existing federal, State and local regulations to implement their model, the most significant of which will be in the hiring and organization of school staff. They state that they may need waivers from negotiated union contracts and from state licensing regulations that require teaching certificates.

Project staff advised that the group of teachers meeting this summer to develop curriculum for the project schools includes special education staff. A basic belief is that all students ultimately will be able to pass the standards "at some respectable level." The proposal clearly delineates the responsibility of their sites by stating that the schools will address the needs of "at-risk" students by providing an academic support system, but those schools will not become multi-service community centers. Rather, they will "rely on other agencies in the community to address the wide variety of other needs they may have."

9) *The National Alliance for Restructuring Education*

This proposal was also submitted by a group of nationally recognized experts most of whom had been a part of the *National Alliance for Restructuring Education* for over a year prior to the competition. The design team was chaired by David Hornbeck and Marc Tucker, and included other well known members including Hillary Clinton, Lauren Resnick, Lisbeth Schorr, and David Mandel. The target sites include many places where significant reform efforts were already underway such as Kentucky and Vermont. The original pace to implement the approach in 243 schools by 1994-5 has been scaled back somewhat, but the year two proposal commits to reaching that number by the 1995-6 school year.

The *Alliance* had developed the New Standards Project (NSP), a very large reform effort involving 18 States and six school districts. With financing from private foundations, the NSP is devising an examination system based on new standards and the NASDC funded sites will be involved in pilot activities for the new assessments.

In addition to the issue of standards and assessment, the original Alliance proposal to NASDC identified the application of Total Quality Management methods to schools and an outcomes-based curriculum as high priorities for their project. Their proposal for second year funding stresses professional development as the "engine of change in the education system," and observes that few educational settings exist in which professionals can learn and have conversations that will facilitate the reflection on experience that will lead to continuous improvement in expertise and actual practice. Their vision is of a school in which personnel are organized in teams, including a leadership team composed of the lead teachers from each team, guided by the principal. There would also be a uniting of the schools in a district with a leadership team composed of "network leaders" who will be expected to train others at their school sites and provide quality control.

Project personnel describe the National Alliance as a systems level project, one that is significantly different from the other NASDC projects where the focus is on individual schools or districts. They admit that much of what they espouse sounds like rhetoric, but they are confident that their major goal of high standards for all students will address the full range of student needs. They state that they recognize that they cannot avoid the issue of the needs of students with disabilities in their reorganization of the system and they will be laying out a full implementation plan over the next two years.

10) *The Odyssey Project*

Many components of this team's design are also part of the other NASDC proposals such as using clusters instead of grade levels, and determining movement through the system on the basis of achievement outcomes. Other features include a longer school year and a requirement that students perform at least 220 hours of community service.

The Odyssey Project, however, encountered a number of significant problems during the 1992-93 school year as it worked on its design phase. A local conservative Christian group, Concerned Citizens for Public Education, was formed to oppose the project that was scheduled to be implemented in three of the 54 schools of Gaston County, NC. Most of the opposition was "directed toward its outcomes-based approach--often a target of conservatives, who say it forces schools to teach values at the expense of core subjects" (Sommerfield, 1993, p. 18). At the same time, the project's director was found dead in his car, a victim of accidental carbon monoxide poisoning.

Despite statements by NASDC officials at the time of these events that they were "not concerned to the point that we are worried about the [design team's] ability to make this design work" (Sommerfield, p. 19), Odyssey was one of the two projects that NASDC denied to fund for phase two. At the time of the announcement, Odyssey was in the process of selecting a new director, and project personnel felt that the NASDC decision was unexpected. It did not appear that any other funds would be available to continue the project.

11) *Roots and Wings*

The one NASDC proposal that clearly planned for the participation of students with disabilities is the one entitled Roots and Wings: Universal Excellence in Elementary Education, submitted by Robert Slavin of Johns Hopkins University in conjunction with the Maryland Department of Education and St. Mary's County Public Schools where the four implementation sites for the project are located. The project has as its focus a comprehensive restructuring of education for children from birth to age 11. According to the project's

proposal, "Roots" refers to strategies that will guarantee that every child will make it successfully through the elementary grades no matter what it takes, and "Wings" involves the improvements in curriculum and instruction that will enabling students to "soar" in their ability to apply what they learn. Extensive use of real-world simulation is a major strategy that will be used to achieve these goals.

Many of the components of the Roots and Wings design are taken from Success for All (SFA), a school reform project started in 1986 by Robert Slavin and now ongoing in 70 schools in 16 States. One example of the effectiveness of SFA is the recent report on the outcomes of that project in 13 schools located in six States which found that "All schools--particularly low-achieving students--improved their reading performance significantly more than did students in a similar school that was not involved in the program"(Rothman, 1993, p.9).

Assurance of the project's intention to include all children is repeated throughout the NASDC Roots and Wings proposal in statements such as, "One [objective] is to ensure that *every* child, regardless of family background or handicapping condition, achieves world class standards in reading, writing/language arts, mathematics, science history and geography." Other features of the design include a non-graded organization, early learning programs, extensive use of technology, tutoring, extended day schedules, site-based management and choice about joining the project for both teachers and students.

One-to-one tutoring is the major educational strategy that will be applied for students at risk of being categorized as learning disabled or mentally retarded, but additional interventions such as family support services, social skills training, behavioral techniques, and other services will be integrated with the child's school program when needed. For students who already have been identified as eligible for special education, the proposal describes the project's approach to remedial and special education as "neverstreaming," which they define as providing prevention and early intervention that are effective enough to keep most students from needing long-term remedial or special education. Project personnel emphasize that their approach is focused on prevention of failure so that children never have to enter the remedial system. With the exception of one-to-one tutoring, no special services will be provided during the school day. Chapter 1 and special education resource services will be provided after school during the extended day program where other resources will be available such as supervised cross-age peer tutoring, play, art, music and homework assistance. A family support team modeled after the work of James Comer will also be a component of the project's schools.

The proposal notes that waiver of some State requirements will be needed to implement this policy. For example, schools will need permission to use special education staff and resources to serve students at risk who do not have individual educational plans

(IEPs). The designers do not anticipate any difficulty in obtaining the necessary permissions since the Maryland Department of Education is a member of the design team, and such waivers have been granted for the Success for All project.

During its first year, the design team wrote a policy paper entitled "Special Roots and Wings" expanding on their conceptualization of the place of special education in their school sites. The project affirms that it goes beyond passive toleration for student diversity and "positively embraces this diversity and capitalizes upon it." The document observes that special education is often pressured to misdiagnose students who are experiencing difficulties just so they can get some special help. Yet, the project recognizes the fact that there are small numbers of children with complex and intense disabilities who will require special education services, whose primary need is to develop independent functioning to the fullest extent possible, and who will require highly individualized instructional targets and/or specialized skills such as Braille or sign language. While the role of special education in project sites is described as one that will depend upon the unique resources in each school, it is envisioned for Roots and Wings schools as one that emphasizes supporting regular education teachers in the classroom, collaborative consultation, and assessment for students with continuing special education needs. The expertise of special educators in the interaction between the characteristics of individual learners and specific learning tasks and contexts will be combined with the disciplinary expertise of general educators. The policy paper also addresses other special education questions such as the need to use categorical funds flexibly, the continued importance of IEPs and of the procedural safeguards protected in special education legislation, and the need to maintain a continuum of placement options for students with disabilities.

Discussion

Ever since its origination with the issuance of the report *A Nation At Risk* in 1982, the current American educational reform movement has evolved and grown with varying amounts of public scrutiny and attention from the political sector. Throughout this period, advocates and other members of the disability community as well as various constituents concerned with the effort to improve outcomes in public education have criticized the movement for its neglect of the special needs of students with disabilities. A recent report issued by the National Association of State Boards of Education concludes that special education has not been asked to join general education in the reform movement (*Winners All*, p. 4). In a similar vein, the National Center on Educational Outcomes has documented that most of the existing national and State data collection programs, e.g., the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have excluded large portions--between 40% and 50%-- of the student population with disabilities in their reports (McGrew, 1992, p. 18). NAEP and other national measures of student achievement in the major academic subjects will play a large role

in documenting student progress toward the national educational goals. A large block of students with special needs including students with disabilities will not be included in the database used to evaluate progress of the nation as a whole. In many cases, ALL does **not** mean ALL.

Only one of the NASDC projects--*Roots and Wings*--delineated the participation of students with disabilities in its proposal and design. That project was developed out of a prior effort that had as a major focus the needs of students at risk for failure. The initial work of the that project staff has produced a policy paper on special education to guide the work of the sites. Although it remains to be seen precisely what kind of provisions the other projects will actually make for special populations, the extent of the preparations up to the end of the first year of most of the projects has been a non-specific pledge to include *all* students in their project sites, a commitment that was a prerequisite to be considered for funding.

Descriptions of some of the NASDC projects suggest that students with disabilities would require significant modifications for meaningful participation. This would have been especially true of the *Expeditionary Learning* project if it had continued as it was originally conceived with the International Baccalaureate (IB) as a major component. Although this element was eliminated during the first year of the project, the incorporation of the rigid, highly academic IB requirements suggests that the design team's initial focus did not extend to populations with special needs such as students with disabilities. Similarly, the exclusive emphasis on academics that characterizes the *Modern Red Schoolhouse* proposal overlooks the special services mandated to be provided to students with disabilities as well as the requirements in laws and regulations for other special populations within the public school system. That proposal's requirement for passing the Advanced Placement examination to earn a high school diploma would exclude from participation a variety of students, including some students with disabilities, for whom a more diverse set of educational outcomes is appropriate.

One of the accomplishments of special education is the individualization of learning that has developed through the use of task analysis to design learning activities. Another is the writing of individual educational programs based on individually identified needs. Although it has proved to be an illusive goal in general education, a commitment to individualization has consistently been an ingredient in program descriptions for many years and the NASDC proposals are no exception. The design teams describe steps that will be taken to operationalize this goal, but many are in the nature of a general approach or a blanket commitment to the concept. For example, *Atlas Communities* schools will apply a process they call "personalization" to discover how each child learns and how the teacher can use that information to meet that child's individual needs.

If the projects are implemented with the degree of individualization most of them propose, the capacity of the regular education classroom to meet special needs would be

significantly improved. Some proposals specify techniques they will use to individualize learning. For example, the *Community Learning Centers* project describes a specific Individual Learning Plan (ILP) that will be written for each child. Similarly, in the *Modern Red Schoolhouse* sites, each student will have an Individual Educational Contract designed by the teacher, the student and the parent for a specified period of time that is described as an accountability measure as well as a strategy for individualizing instruction.

Choice is another feature of some of the NASDC projects that has implications for the inclusion of students with disabilities. The *Community Learning Centers of Minnesota* project is based on the charter school concept, a variation of the school choice approach. Although little research has been done on school choice as a structural option in education or on the participation and effects of that structure on students with disabilities, the many potential complications for students eligible for special education programs and services have been documented by recent publications (O'Reilly, 1990; Ysseldyke, Lange and Algozzine, 1991; Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Algozzine and Nathan, 1991). For example, Federal and State laws place the requirement of assuring a free, appropriate education on the school district of residence of the student with disabilities. If that student chooses to attend another district, it is not clear which district has the responsibility for meeting this provision and all the related requirements such as developing an IEP, making placement decisions, conducting due process activities, etc. The locus of fiscal responsibility is equally problematic and is not clearly addressed in existing State laws and regulations. In addition, there are many logistical issues, such as transportation, that are even more complicated because of the special provisions that apply to students with disabilities. No indication was found that any of the special preparations and adaptations necessary to accommodate students with disabilities were a part of the planning for the NASDC schools of choice.

Some components of NASDC projects could be described as effective approaches for students with special needs even though those features were not specifically designed to meet the needs of any special population. For example, one of the needs often cited for students with disabilities is consistency over time especially in terms of contact with teaching staff that lasts longer than one school year. Features of some of the projects such as the cluster structure of the *Co-NECT School* project could provide this type of supportive atmosphere. Similarly, the *Expeditionary Learning* project provides for each group of students (or "crew) to remain together with the same teacher for at least three years. Another version of this type of supportive design is seen in the "moving diamond" as proposed for the *Los Angeles Learning Centers* project. There, the student will remain within each Learning Center cluster (such as K-4) with a consistent support network composed of the teacher, an older student helper, and the parents or other community support source.

A staff member of one of the projects suggested that a meeting of the project directors be convened by NASDC to discuss the topic of special education. To date, two joint meeting

of project directors have been held by the Corporation focusing on the topics of project-based learning and standards. NASDC personnel agreed that it would be valuable for the projects to learn more about the needs of students with disabilities and expressed their intention to include this topic in the next project directors' meeting.

One of the most important contributions these projects can make to the improvement of educational outcomes for all students is the dissemination of their experiences in implementing innovative strategies for both instruction and administration. As mentioned in the initial description, subsequent replication of the designs in other locations is a major goal of the project. Some of the proposed techniques closely resemble approaches that were developed as a part of special education, e.g., individual learning plans. The NASDC project can provide significant input for American education not only through full replications of the successful project designs, but also by disseminating its evaluation of the experience at project sites in implementing these and other revised approaches to improve educational outcomes for all students.

Conclusions

Despite the political changes and fundraising problems that have threatened its continuation, the New American Schools Development Corporation has entered the second year of its five year program armed with the endorsement of the new administration and corporate promises to continue to fund projects that will design the American public education system of the future. This review of the proposals and initial implementation plans of the funded projects found little specific recognition of the special needs of the increasingly diverse population in America's public schools and virtually no acknowledgement of the special services and protections that are required to be made available for students under Federal and State special education laws and regulations. It remains to be seen how the innovative approaches described in the design proposals will be implemented and what effects they will have on meeting the exceptional learning needs of their students with disabilities.

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APPENDIX A

Proposals Received by NASDC Broken Out By State

NEW AMERICAN SCHOOLS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Proposals Received Broken Out By State

American Samoa - 1
Canada - 2

TOTAL - 686

APPENDIX B

NASDC Education Advisory Panel

New American Schools Development Corporation

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APPENDIX C

NASDC Funded Design Teams for Year I

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